



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
MANAGER'S REPORT

DATE ISSUED: March 9, 2005

REPORT NO. 05-059

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of March 15, 2005

SUBJECT: Appeal of the Planning Commission's denial of an initiation of an amendment to the Progress Guide and General Plan and the Serra Mesa Community Plan to include a street connection between Phyllis Place and Friars Road in the Circulation Element (Quarry Falls). Project No. 9386

APPELLANT: Tom Sudberry, Sudberry Properties, Inc.

REFERENCE: Planning Commission agenda of December 9, 2004

SUMMARY

Issue - Should the City Council grant the appeal and initiate an amendment to the Serra Mesa Community Plan and Progress Guide and General Plan pursuant to Municipal Code Section 122.0103? This initiation has been requested to amend the Serra Mesa Community Plan to provide for a street connection between Phyllis Place in Serra Mesa and Friars Road in Mission Valley.

Manager's Recommendation – Grant the appeal and initiate the plan amendment process, in accordance with Section 122.0103 of the Municipal Code.

Planning Commission Recommendation – The Planning Commission voted first 2-2-0 on a motion to approve the initiation, with the motion failing. The Planning Commission, at the request of the chair, revoted 4-0-0 to deny the initiation request so that the applicant could appeal the decision.

Community Planning Group Recommendations – On October 16, 2003, the Serra Mesa Community Planning Group voted 7-3-0 to not support initiating the amendment to the Serra Mesa Community Plan to provide a street connection between the proposed

development, predominantly in Mission Valley, and Phyllis Place near I-805 in Serra Mesa, due to potential traffic impacts. The planning group further recommended that alternative solutions be investigated within Mission Valley to improve I-805 and SR-163 access.

On August 6, 2003, the Mission Valley Unified Planning Committee voted 10-0-0 (with five recusals) in support of initiating the plan amendment for Quarry Falls in Mission Valley (and support for the street connection to Phyllis Place in Serra Mesa). On October 6, 2004 they reaffirmed their vote. The Mission Valley Unified Planning Committee discussed how the proposed street would decrease the traffic along Mission Center Road and Friars Road and provide an alternate route to directly access I-805.

Environmental Impact - If initiated, the proposed plan amendment and future discretionary actions will be subject to environmental review.

Fiscal Impact - Processing costs are paid by the applicant.

Code Enforcement Impact – None.

Housing Impact – There are no housing impacts with this amendment. The amendment would only affect the Circulation Element of the Serra Mesa Community Plan. This amendment would help accommodate development on the adjacent site in Mission Valley (for Quarry Falls) which is expected to include a variety of new housing products.

BACKGROUND

This item is an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision of December 9, 2004, to deny a Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment initiation request. The request is to add to the Circulation Element of the Serra Mesa Community Plan, a street connection between Phyllis Place in Serra Mesa and Friars Road in Mission Valley. The Mission Valley Community Plan recommends adding the street connection while the Serra Mesa Community Plan does not mention a street connection. The Planning Commission voted first 2-2-0 on a motion to approve the initiation, with the motion failing. The Planning Commission, at the request of the chair, revoted 4-0-0 to deny the initiation request so that the applicant could appeal the decision. An appeal of the denial was submitted on December 17, 2004 by Tom Sudberry (see Attachment 1). The applicant has appealed the Planning Commission decision to City Council to determine whether there is merit in pursuing the street connection and resolving the discrepancy between the two community plans.

The proposed street connection is associated with a proposed development project to the south, Quarry Falls. The Quarry Falls project is predominantly in Mission Valley (224 of the 230 acre site), located north of Friars Road between Mission Center Road and I-805 (see Attachment 2). Of the total Quarry Falls acreage, six acres are in Serra Mesa. The Quarry Falls development project will include 230 acres of development and will include a variety of housing types, retail use and office space. The project will also include the creation of a park located at the northerly portion of the site (in Serra Mesa), public open space via a green belt, and a connection to

Mission Valley through an interconnected system of streets that will provide access for pedestrians, cars and bicycles. The Quarry Falls project site is identified as a potential urban village in the Strategic Framework Element of the General Plan and will be subject to the Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines.

On May 6, 2004, the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment initiation was brought before the Planning Commission as part of a joint initiation request for both the Serra Mesa and Mission Valley Community Plans. The Mission Valley Community Plan amendment initiation was required to process a specific plan for the Quarry Falls project. An amendment to the Serra Mesa Community Plan was requested to study a street connection between Phyllis Place (in Serra Mesa) and Friars Road (in Mission Valley) that would go through the Quarry Falls project (see Attachment 3). This street connection is not shown in the Serra Mesa Community Plan although the Mission Valley Community Plan recommends that there be a street connection from Friars Road to Phyllis Place upon development of the Quarry Falls site. At the May 6, 2004 hearing, the Planning Commission initiated only the Mission Valley Community Plan amendment. The Planning Commission denied the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment initiation request but requested a field trip and a workshop.

A public workshop and field trip to the site and environs was subsequently scheduled for September 23, 2004. At the workshop, the Planning Commission asked for additional street intersection designs for the Phyllis Place connection, potential alternative locations for the street connection and to study Quarry Falls' traffic without a road connection as an option. The applicant resubmitted the request to initiate the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment to include the street connection between Phyllis Place and Friars Road. On October 21, 2004, the applicant presented several street design concepts to the Serra Mesa Community Planning Group as an informational item (see Attachment 4, 5, and 6). As discussed earlier, the initiation request was resubmitted and denied by Planning Commission on December 9, 2004.

The criteria for meeting the Municipal Code requirements (Section 122.0104) for an initiation of an amendment to a land use plan was presented in the May 6, 2004 and December 9, 2004 Planning Commission reports (see Attachment 7). In both reports, it was discussed how the street connection proposal met the criteria for initiating a community plan amendment. The street connection proposal is consistent with the goals and objectives for the Serra Mesa and Mission Valley Community Plans, Progress Guide and General Plan, Strategic Framework Element, and Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines. To summarize briefly, the street proposal is consistent with the Serra Mesa Community Plan because it would provide vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle connections between Serra Mesa and Mission Valley to provide a more direct street linkage between the two communities and to I-805. The street proposal is consistent with the Mission Valley Community Plan because the plan recommends the inclusion of the street with the development of the Quarry Falls project site. This policy cannot be fulfilled without amending the Serra Mesa Community Plan. The adjacent Quarry Falls project is identified as an urban village site in the Strategic Framework Element opportunities area map. As such, the street proposal would fulfill the goals and guidelines of the Strategic Framework Element by proposing an interconnected system of streets to retrofit existing neighborhoods to enhance walkability, bicycling, and distribution of traffic. Because the Quarry Falls project is identified as an urban village site, the Strategic Framework Element recommends applying the

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Guidelines to the site. The street connection helps implement the TOD guidelines by creating a system of local streets that reduce the use of arterial streets and promotes the use of connector streets.

The Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment initiation is needed for Quarry Falls so that this option can be considered by the decision makers when the project comes forward for a hearing. For the City Council to approve the initiation it must be determined that the criteria in Section 122.0104 can be met (see Attachment 7). A detailed traffic analysis will determine the impacts to Serra Mesa and Mission Valley with and without the street connection; however, it is not complete at this time. By initiating the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment, the conflict between the two community plans regarding the street could be resolved in either direction, with or without the street connection. A denial of the initiation would require the applicant to submit a Specific Plan for Quarry Falls without the street connection, and concurrently delete the street connection language from the Mission Valley Community Plan.

DISCUSSION

Since the December 9, 2004 Planning Commission hearing for the initiation request, City staff and the applicant's traffic consultants have continued to study the options for street connections and potential traffic impacts. The following discussion includes preliminary traffic analysis and information not previously discussed in the December 9, 2004 staff report.

Benefits of Street Connection to Phyllis Place

The Travel Forecasting Section of the Planning Department is currently working on updating the Transportation Element of the Mission Valley Community Plan. Different scenarios will be evaluated with varying land uses and roadway network alternatives. There are numerous roadways that have been planned in the community but have not yet been constructed. Alternative scenarios without some of these roadway segments will be evaluated to determine their need from a traffic perspective. Attachment 8 illustrates the roadway segments that are being studied, and denotes certain roadways to be studied for deletion or modification. These studies will be used in assessing the need for the Phyllis Place connection. Preliminary analysis shows that most of the segments being studied produce localized impacts to the valley. For example, a preliminary study shows that the deletion of segments on Camino de la Reina and Via Las Cumbres will primarily impact the western portion of the community. The deletion of Mission City Parkway will impact the eastern portion of the community.

Conversely, preliminary studies show that the deletion of the connection to Phyllis Place impacts more locations within the community than any of the other individual segments that have been studied to date. If Phyllis Place were to be eliminated in the future, traffic will be diverted to SR-163/Friars Road interchange, I-8/Mission Center Road interchange, I-8/Qualcomm Way interchange, and I-15/Friars Road interchange. The deletion of Phyllis Place also introduces additional out-of-direction travel which in turn impacts the local intersections leading to these freeway interchanges (see Attachment 9). The potential impacts of these street deletions to Mission Valley and Serra Mesa will need to be studied in more detail to understand fully which streets can be deleted and which ones must remain in place.

Alternative Freeway Connections

Freeway connections are important and access to them is vital to all communities. This is especially true in Mission Valley which has a regional draw and many freeways intersecting the valley. The largest problem areas within the valley are at the freeway interchanges which, in turn, back traffic up to the local streets. In response to requests by the Serra Mesa Community Planning Group and Planning Commission, alternative locations for connections from the Quarry Falls project site to I-805 were investigated (see Attachment 10). The applicant discussed this with Caltrans and found an alternative location was not feasible. One option had sizable grade differences between the site and the freeway and was less than one mile from the Phyllis Place on-ramp to I-805. Another option that was investigated was a new on-ramp to I-805 via the northerly portion of Mission Center Road through the canyon. This option had issues of environmental impacts, grade differences from the canyon to the freeway, and again, the one mile separation requirement from Caltrans between on-ramps to the freeway prevented further investigation of this option.

Traffic Improvements to Phyllis Place

The proposed street connection to Phyllis Place would involve a redesign of Phyllis Place north of the Quarry Falls project. This would include a new “T” intersection, and would include a redesign of Phyllis Place west of the street connection (see Attachment 11). This would be accomplished with appropriate signage, a new landscaped median and a narrowing of the right-of-way west of the “T” intersection. The Abbots Hill neighborhood, west of the proposed street connection, which contains approximately 225 residences, has voiced concerns about cars inadvertently traveling into their neighborhood looking for access to Mission Valley. The redesign of Phyllis Place with the street connection would address the concerns of the Abbots Hill residents and provide clear direction to Mission Valley.

Inter-Connectivity between Neighborhoods/Communities by Local Streets

The proposed street connection to Phyllis Place would create opportunities for the Serra Mesa neighborhood to be connected to the Mission Valley portion of the proposed Quarry Falls’ development project by vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle. The proposed street connection would facilitate vehicular travel on local streets between the communities. This street connection would not negatively impact the local street system in Abbots Hill. Phyllis Place is designated in the Serra Mesa Community Plan as a major street, but currently operates as a collector street. The Progress Guide and General Plan policies recommend an interconnected street system for neighborhoods whenever possible to increase the movement of vehicles, goods and services along with pedestrian and bicycling to reduce traffic congestion.

CONCLUSION

The criteria for initiating a community plan amendment can be met, and have been presented to the Planning Commission on May 6 and December 9, 2004. The staff analysis of the proposed Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment initiation request demonstrated that the proposed Quarry Falls project fulfills numerous City policies that are found in the following documents:

Progress Guide and General Plan, Strategic Framework Element, Transit-Oriented Development Design Guidelines, and Serra Mesa and Mission Valley Community Plans. Staff recommends the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment be initiated to study the potential for a connection to improve access to nearby freeways, reduce local street traffic congestion, improve traffic flow and intersection conditions on Murray Ridge Road at I-805, increase inter-community access, and to allow the resolution of the conflict between the existing Mission Valley and Serra Mesa Community Plans.

ALTERNATIVES

The alternative is to not initiate the Serra Mesa Community Plan amendment. With this action, the proposed specific plan for Mission Valley could not consider the inclusion of the Phyllis Place street connection. This is not recommended because the street connection has several potential benefits that should be considered for community-wide traffic congestion reduction. After analysis has been conducted, the street connection could still be eliminated, if appropriate.

Respectfully submitted,

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Planning Director

Patricia T. Frazier
Deputy City Manager

SGG/LH/ah

Note: Attachment 7 is available in electronic format. A complete copy for review is available in the Office of the City Clerk.

- Attachments:
1. Appeal Form
 2. Quarry Falls location map
 3. Location map for street connection
 4. Phyllis Place street connection concept
 5. Phyllis Place rendering
 6. Quarry Falls site elevation section
 7. Criteria for initiation of amendments to land use plans
 8. Modified Network Alternative 1
 9. Impacts to the local street system
 10. Potential on-ramp locations studied
 11. Phyllis Place “T” intersection and detail
 12. Ownership Disclosure

